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Gus Dur should be sympathised with

Datuk Adam Kadir

PRESIDENT Abdurrahman Wahid of Indonesia should be sympathised with for what he had said about Malaysia.

Given time and experience he would mature in his position and would be able to leave behind all the past habits of saying things in a trigger-happy way for the consumption of his followers.

Gus Dur, as he is popularly known, reminds me of the late President Franklin Roosevelt of the United States.

They share a common attribute; being "sitting" President, in the literal sense of the word.

While Roosevelt, crippled by polio, was wheeled around to crucial places in leading the US out of depression and subsequently in winning World War II, Gus Dur has yet to leave his mark even in the affairs of his country, let alone the regional ones.

The fact that Malaysia chooses to remain silent on what takes place around it "from Sabang to Marauke" goes to show the extent of understanding and good sense in the realm of neighbourhood orderliness and diplomacy. This means that to say or not to say things at that level is very critical.

The late President Sukarno, Indonesia's first President, once simplified the concept of international relations as the ties between leaders at international level.

The historical background to this was when he was made to wait for an unnecessarily long time before being able to see President Dwight Eisenhower at the White House.

The Indonesia-US relations chilled after that, only to become warm again when President John F. Kennedy took office.

Obviously, Kennedy made amends and gave Sukarno the appropriate respect when the latter revisited Washington.

But again, equality is not something that is natural even from birth. Equality, or lack of it, becomes more wanting when people go through life. Hard at hearing or sighting may offer some tough moments in personal communication.

Gus Dur and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad might have sat down somewhere and talked about mutual interests of Malaysia and Indonesia.

Along the way, some words were lost but for the sake of being polite, each phrasing was punctuated with affirmative "ya", which is the Malay-Indonesian way of getting conversation going, but could be taken as something being agreed upon.

This probably explains Gus Dur's statement that Kuala Lumpur wanted him to assist Malaysia in making friends with Israel, which Indonesia now denies.

Again, was Gus Dur that focused when he commented about Malaysia's Ministers spending a substantial time in golf courses?

True, may be, to an extent, but surely not during office hours. But for him to say it even in jest is not what can be attributed to a good taste, certainly not from a leader of a country in the stature of Indonesia.